

“I WANT TO BE ALONE”

ASCETIC CELEBRITY AND THE SPLENDID ISOLATION OF SIMEON STYLITES

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This was, after all, an era of flamboyance.

—Harvey, “The Stylite’s Liturgy”

At the heart of the earliest surviving narrative of the astounding Syrian saint Simeon (known as the “Stylite”) stands the paradox of his ascetic celebrity.¹ His biographer, Bishop Theodoret of Cyrrhus, juxtaposes Simeon’s growing fame—“his reputation [*phēmēs*] spreading everywhere”²—with Simeon’s equally growing desire for solitude. Theodoret tells us in the *Religious History*:

As the visitors came in increasing numbers and they all tried to touch him and gain some blessing from those skin garments, [Simeon] thought at first that this excess of honor was out of place, but then found it annoying and tedious [*to epiponon duscherainōn*] and therefore devised the standing on a column.³

If Simeon could not predict the results of this attempt to isolate himself from the tedium of unwanted attention by standing on an increasingly tall stone column, Theodoret explains that God certainly did: “he arranged this extraordinary novelty to draw everyone by its strangeness to the spectacle.”⁴ Simeon’s “solution” to the problem of his interrupted isolation produces exactly the opposite result: his fame grows and grows, and the ascetic seeking withdrawal becomes famous around the world.⁵ The more the monastic

saint seeks to isolate himself in extreme solitude, the more he ends up magnifying and augmenting his fame. In withdrawal, the curious crowds only grow greater. It is this paradox of ascetic fame I wish to consider in this essay.

My title comes from a line (mis)attributed to film star Greta Garbo, who, after decades of fame in silent and sound movies, was believed to have renounced the spectacle of public celebrity by pleading, in her famous gravelly accent, “I want to be alone.”⁶ Her withdrawal from the public spotlight in the early 1940s only increased that public’s desire to see her. This desire was made manifest in a three-part photo-essay in consecutive issues of *Life* magazine in 1955.⁷ In it her biographer John Bainbridge reported: “I never said, ‘I want to be alone,’” she told a friend recently. ‘I only said, ‘I want to be *let* alone!’ There is all the difference.”⁸ (In fact, Garbo had spoken her famous line in the 1932 film *Grand Hotel*.) Reiterating a desire for solitude at the beginning of the third part of a national magazine photo-essay makes clear the paradox: as in the case of Simeon Stylites, pleas for solitude only amplify an audience’s desire for access.⁹

One way to grapple with this paradox in the life of Simeon is through modern theoretical discussions of *celebrity* as a social and cultural framework within which individual figures are augmented beyond the status of *person* into that of *icon*: a site for the representation and contestation of sociocultural norms and ideals. In the words of Graeme Turner, attention to the discourse of celebrity underscores “the celebrity’s role as a location for the interrogation and elaboration of cultural identity.”¹⁰ Just as a blurry photograph of Garbo receding into a New York City street captures her image to tell larger stories about wealth, gender, and publicity, so too the reticent figure of Simeon atop his pillar, captured and amplified by hagiography, signifies in complicated ways beyond the bounds of his lived life. After briefly surveying the theoretical insights of celebrity studies, I turn to explore the multiple possible functions of celebrity in late ancient hagiographies of Simeon.

Celebrities and Saints

Although “celebrity” is a determinedly modern concept, its recent theoretical elaborations may nonetheless help us explore the paradox of late ancient ascetic celebrity.¹¹ Indebted to analyses of status and charisma by Weber,¹² contemporary celebrity studies emerged as a form of cultural cri-

tique in the 1960s.¹³ In recent decades, the critique has modulated into an open-ended form of cultural analysis: the student of celebrity comes not to bury the "star" but rather to understand her role in cultural production. Three particular, interrelated insights of celebrity studies will be helpful in analyzing ancient ascetic fame: celebrity as a form of *signification*; the cultural *ambiguity* of celebrities; and the *commodification* of celebrities.

David Marshall has most clearly reframed the modern celebrity as a *sign* that embodies the "tension between authentic and false cultural value. . . . The power of the celebrity, then, is to represent the active construction of identity in the social world."¹⁴ The value of the celebrity sign, Marshall explains, extends well beyond the actual *person* who is celebrated: "The material reality of the celebrity sign—that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation—disappears into a cultural formation of meaning."¹⁵ The pop star, the movie star, and the star athlete never signify simply in the realm of music, cinema, or sports: they are "an embodiment of a discursive battleground on the norms of individuality and personality within a culture."¹⁶ Celebrities inevitably become sites for the interrogations of broader social and cultural themes: sex, gender, race, religion, nation, and so forth.

As embodiments of cultural value dislodged from their original, material contexts, celebrities become *ambiguous* and shifting signs. The "star" is at once exemplary ("just like us!") and extraordinary ("in a world of their own!"): "Stars represent typical ways of behaving, feeling and thinking in contemporary society, ways that have been socially, culturally, historically constructed";¹⁷ but at the same time, "stars embody cultural contradictions in the realm of identity."¹⁸ The extraordinary example of the celebrity, to whom audiences can aspire but never become, makes them a safe space for interrogating cultural ideas from diverse, even conflicting perspectives: "The celebrity is simultaneously a construction of the dominant culture and a construction of the subordinate audiences of the culture."¹⁹ The celebrity does not merely reflect culture; the celebrity-sign embodies culture's instabilities and potentialities. Celebrities are "proxies of change [who] define the construction of change and transformation in contemporary culture, the very instability of social categories and hierarchies in contemporary culture."²⁰ We look at celebrities and see at once an icon of our current moment and the alternative possibilities of that moment.

Finally, the ambiguity of the celebrity's meaning in wider culture is enabled and augmented through processes of *commodification*. Not only are

the products of celebrities monetized (movies, songs, sporting events), but so are their likenesses and, through diverse forms of media, their very personas.²¹ That is, the *person* of a celebrity is abstracted away from her material being and put into circulation. This celebrity abstraction results in a “celebrity economy—a system of production and consumption in which people become fungible commodities and their presence an exchangeable resource.”²² All celebrities become, in some sense, famous for their fame, and this abstract quality (“celebrity”) allows us to compare and exchange them. This commodified abstraction can in turn generate a peculiar self-reflexivity, such that the circulating image of a famous person becomes a space for the consideration of that very abstract quality of fame. The recurring appeal of Garbo’s plea to be left alone is a signal example of this reflexive consideration of “celebrity,” enabled by the circulation of the celebrity’s image.

Although many students of celebrity insist on its modern specificity,²³ I argue that we can see these three interconnected elements of “celebrification”—its signifying, its ambiguity, and its commodification—at work in late ancient Christian hagiography. First, the writing of a saint’s life transforms a *person* into a *sign*, which can then be interpreted, circulated, and recapitulated in multiple forms, each capable of new and shifting signification.²⁴ Second, this shifting signification creates a productive ambiguity around the saint. Saints serve as moral and even material models for idealized human behavior, yet their example far exceeds the “norms” of human life. Françoise Meltzer and Jaś Elsner have written: “The holy man or woman provides a space in which to think differently, to think against and outside socially normative patterns, and this in a variety of religions. Saints queer stable binary structures.”²⁵ The saint, like the celebrity, signifies cultural identities but also opens up the possibility of subverting those identities.

Finally, saints are indubitably subject to forms of commodification and circulation (we will see a signal example in Theodoret’s life of Simeon below). Hagiography itself is a form of commodification, in which the persona of the holy man or woman is abstracted away from his or her material existence: a life becomes a *vita*.²⁶ Simultaneously with the literary (re)production of saints comes the circulation of tokens, icons, ampullae, and relics, which insert the saint into a kind of “saintly economy” through which they may be compared and exchanged with other saints.²⁷ “Saintliness” itself becomes a commodity to be exchanged and (at the same time)

becomes subject to critique.²⁸ As in modern discussions of celebrities, we find some late ancient saints' lives openly reflecting on the fact (problem? boon?) of saintly celebrification. In these more self-reflexive lives, like the lives of Simeon Stylites, we can most clearly explore the ways in which ascetic fame reproduces the multifarious possibilities of late ancient Christian culture.

Simeon as Celebrity

Theodoret is not the first hagiographer to highlight his subject's reluctant fame. Already in the *Life of Antony*, which so quickly circulated the iconic image of the monastic desert throughout the Christian world, the Egyptian hermit models a path of withdrawal that serves only to heighten his fame.²⁹ Antony's twenty years of isolation in an abandoned fort are brought to an end when "eager" disciples begin to break into his fortress of solitude.³⁰ Antony's final withdrawal to the "inner mountain" is impelled by the press of eager Christians seeking healing and guidance:

As he saw himself mobbed by crowds, and not free to withdraw [*anachōrein*] as he had decided to do, wary lest, of the things the Lord did through him, either he should be flattered or someone else would suppose he was more than he was, he considered and set off to go up into the upper Thebaid, among those who didn't know him.³¹

This fear of the celebrity attendant upon ascetic withdrawal makes a brief but memorable appearance in the *Life of Antony*. But even if earlier hagiographic exemplars had discussed ascetic celebrity in passing, this trope takes a central role in Theodoret's life of Simeon.³²

In Theodoret's *Religious History*, Simeon's reluctant fame is drawn into high relief by the repeated emphasis on the holiness of isolation in the early chapters of the *vita*.³³ When Simeon, by chance, hears the inspiring Beatitudes in church, "one of the bystanders" suggests that Simeon could achieve this purity through the "solitary [*monadikos*] life."³⁴ Simeon joins a monastery led by "the excellent Heliodorus," who entered the monastery as a child and lived his entire ascetic life "without ever having seen anything that happens in the world."³⁵ When Simeon is expelled for the first time from this monastery for excessive mortification, he moves on to "the more uninhabited [*erēmoterā*] parts of the mountain."³⁶ Soon after, Simeon seals himself up in a hut in Telanissos, with the intention of fasting for the forty

days of Lent,³⁷ a feat reported by the peripatetic priest Bassus to “his own flock,” a large group of severely cloistered monks totally isolated from the outside world.³⁸

Simeon then devises a means of enforced isolation coupled with divine contemplation. Climbing the summit of the hill at the base of which Telanissos stands, Simeon confines himself inside a circular wall (so that he can see only the heavens above) and has himself chained inside to an immovable rock.³⁹ The image of isolation is total, disrupted only when the passing itinerant bishop Meletius shames Simeon by telling him that a true ascetic would not need the chains to maintain his solitude. A reader of this life will, so far, have received the message clearly: the life of ascetic purity is one pursued in keen and willing solitude.

It is immediately after this scene, however, that we first hear of Simeon’s growing celebrity: “As his reputation [*phēmēs*] spread everywhere, all hurried to him—not just those in the neighborhood, but also those who lived many days’ journey distant.”⁴⁰ Theodoret cannot help but give his reader a preview of the eventual juggernaut of Simeon’s fame, noting how, in Theodoret’s own time, that initial trickle of regional supplicants has grown into a world-spanning “river”:

not only inhabitants of our part of the world pour in, but also Ishmaelites, Persians and the Armenians subject to them, the Iberians, the Homerites. . . . Spaniards, Britons, and the Gauls who dwell between them. It is superfluous to speak of Italy, for they say that he became so well-known in the great city of Rome that small portraits of him were set up on a column at the entrances of every shop.⁴¹

The space between Simeon’s initial fame and his worldwide commodification is barely a page in Theodoret’s text, so rapid is the saint’s celebration. The image of tiny, columned Simeons dotting the urban landscape of Rome underscores the extent of the saint’s commodified circulation.

At this point in Theodoret’s narrative Simeon flees his “tedious” admirers by devising the column, the paradoxical moment with which I began this essay. As we have seen, the column is impelled by, but only increases, Simeon’s fame, a “divine spectacle” of piety God has put into circulation much in the same way, Theodoret writes, that emperors devise new images for their imperial coinage.⁴² Once on his pillar, Simeon becomes both physically remote from his enamored fans and yet increasingly comfortable with their attentions. Theodoret recalls an occasion when a band of

Ishmaelites came to the column seeking conversion. Theodoret reports that Simeon "ordered them to approach and receive from me the priestly blessing." Theodoret finds himself nearly trampled to death by the straining, tugging, and climbing supplicants: only Simeon's urgent cry from above "disperses" the mob.⁴³ This striking image invokes, simultaneously, the remoteness of the saint on his pillar and the riotous chaos of adoration: the perfect juxtaposition of ascetic solitude and fame.

Near the end of his narrative, Theodoret portrays Simeon at peace with his fame: "For night and day he stands in open view. He had the doors taken away and a good part of the enclosing wall destroyed, and so presents to everyone a new and extraordinary spectacle [*paradoxon*]." ⁴⁴ Simeon preaches from his pillar and even engages directly with his audience: "Besides his unpretentiousness, he is very approachable, pleasant, and charming [*glukus kai epicharis*]." ⁴⁵ The saint who achieved fame by his desire for solitude approaches the end of his life as a "paradox" embodied: the isolated saint made accessible, the remote holy man intimately connected to those on the ground.

Church and Empire in the Saint's Shadow

Following the insights of celebrity studies, we can ask two questions about Theodoret's representation of the celebrity saint. First, what ambiguous significations does the persona of Simeon open up for interrogation in Theodoret's life? Second, to what use does Theodoret put this self-reflexive focus on the paradox of ascetic celebrity? Of course, Theodoret's depiction of Simeon's twinned isolation and fame signifies a great deal about the subjects to which it immediately pertains: bodily mortification, public piety, and devotion to Christ.⁴⁶ But, as suggested by celebrity studies, celebrity signifies much more broadly outside its original field of meaning. Ellen Muehlberger has argued, for instance, that Theodoret employs the figure of Simeon (as well as other holy men in the *Religious History*) to think critically and in somewhat paradoxical fashion about gender difference and human nature.⁴⁷ Simeon would not be the first, or last, saintly celebrity used to interrogate the complications of gender in the age of Christian asceticism.⁴⁸ His celebrification, in fact, makes him imminently suitable to such considerations as a figure both exemplary and extraordinary at once: "For what took place," Theodoret notes as he begins Simeon's *vita*, "surpasses human nature, and people are accustomed to measure what is said

by the yardstick of what is natural.”⁴⁹ Simeon lets his readers question what is “natural” to humans devoted to God.

I would like to focus briefly on two institutions opened to interrogation by Simeon’s saintliness in Theodoret’s *vita*: church and empire. Celebrities often, according to Graeme Turner, open up spaces for the reconsideration of community.⁵⁰ In her study of the *Religious History*, Theresa Urbainczyk notes the ways Theodoret juxtaposes Simeon’s renown with his personal limitations: “So Symeon appears, or Theodoret makes him appear, extreme, obstreperous, and even rather stupid. . . . Theodoret presents Symeon in a less than positive light.”⁵¹ Urbainczyk suggests that Simeon’s ineptness emerges in two broader social contexts in particular: ecclesiastical authority (which Simeon flouts to his own constant personal peril) and imperial power (the civilizing powers of which he seems largely unaware).

With respect to the institutional church, Urbainczyk notes, ecclesiastical obedience does not come easily to Simeon, either in monasteries or as a solitary ascetic: “Symeon displays a certain obstinacy that the church and other monks could see was on the verge of suicidal.”⁵² Yet he immediately, and often silently, takes correction from his ecclesiastical superiors, as when Bishop Meletius recommends that Simeon dispense with the chain keeping him fixed in one spot. In a more broadly symbolic vein, Susan Ashbrook Harvey has explained how, in lives of Simeon and other Syriac stylites, “ultimately liturgy transfigured the ascetic body of the stylite into the ecclesial body of the church.”⁵³ She persuasively notes how liturgical language and action shape ecclesiastical community around the saint, producing a united church institution. In Theodoret’s life, Harvey claims, “Theodoret stressed Simeon’s obedience to ecclesiastical authority (and not least to Theodoret’s own episcopal prerogative) in terms that clearly ring of an agenda of social control: the charismatic saint is depicted as obedient to the institutional authority of the church.”⁵⁴

I suggest, however, that Simeon’s fluid signification as a saintly celebrity, and a closer look at Theodoret’s personal relationship to Simeon, disrupt any simple reading of a triumphant institutional church. Theodoret is present throughout the *Religious History*, whether being brought as a child to visit local holy men or ministering to them as their bishop and receiving their obeisance.⁵⁵ He is especially careful, because of its extraordinary nature, to represent himself as an “eyewitness” (*autoptēs*) to Simeon’s miraculous and otherworldly ascetic life.⁵⁶ Not only has Theodoret seen Sime-

on's miracles, but he has heard firsthand his "predictions of future events."⁵⁷ What's more, he has personally benefited from Simeon's clairvoyance: "When I myself was under attack from someone, he intimated to me fifteen days in advance the destruction of my enemy, and I learned by experience the truth of his prediction."⁵⁸ Audiences could interpret Theodoret's personal "experience" (*peira*) of Simeon in multiple ways: as the subordination of ascetic charisma to institutional authority or as the necessary mediation of the ascetic between the bishop and divine truth.

Even more striking: How should we interpret Theodoret's near trampling by eager Ishmaelites at the foot of Simeon's pillar, which I noted earlier? On the one hand, Simeon is presenting the barbarian horde for Theodoret's priestly blessing, a source of "great profit" and a sure indicator of the bishop's authority. On the other hand, what audience would miss the sharp contrast between the serene saint calling down from his pillar and the bishop almost knocked off his feet? The only absolutely clear point in these scenes is that Simeon, shining from his pillar, illuminates *something* about the authority of the institutional church. That something is up for grabs in the dazzle of the saint's life.

The role of imperial authority in Theodoret's life of Simeon also signifies ambivalently. Once more we can consider the crowd of Ishmaelites pressing in on Bishop Theodoret. Is this an apt image for the rush of barbarians across the nearby *limites* of the Roman Empire? Is Simeon's pillar positioned to open the frontier to them or to hold them back? Theodoret notably never delivers his priestly blessing (which would presumably have been delivered in civilizing Greek), as the crowd is dispersed by Simeon's (Syriac?) "cry": the barbarians repulsed or the civilizing mission of empire failed?

Theodoret frequently represents "barbarians"—Ishmaelites, Saracens, and other "tribes" unnamed—at the foot of the pillar, requesting miracles and acting out.⁵⁹ In another scene reminiscent of the trampling Ishmaelites, Theodoret shows himself unable to calm a fight between enemy tribes—"typical of barbarians [*barbarikēs*]"—who are only silenced by Simeon: "hurling threats at them from above and calling them dogs, he, with difficulty [*mogis*], quenched their quarrel."⁶⁰ We are unable to forget, in these scenes, that Simeon's pillar, and Theodoret's hagiography, stand on the frontiers of the Greco-Roman world. Simeon stands closer to the Persian kings who venerate him as a saint than to the Roman shopkeepers who erect his replica for protection.⁶¹ What role does the famous saint play

in these borderlands? Is he the civilizing saint or the barbarizing saint? (Here, the linguistic contrast Theodoret suggests between his Hellenic text and his Syriac saints in the *Religious History* takes on political overtones.)⁶² Does Simeon face outward toward the uncivilized barbarians or inward toward the civilized Christians? Or does he, Janus-like, face both in and out at once?

Anthony Eastmond offered the suggestion that Simeon's pillar, among other public monuments, might evoke the triumphal pillars of Roman emperors, noting that, when Simeon ascended his pillar in the early 400s, "Constantinople was at the height of its column-building programme."⁶³ He insists that this suggestion must remain purely speculative, since no ancient source (including Theodoret) makes the comparison explicit. It is doubtless true, though, that Theodoret positions Simeon deliberately and ambiguously on the frontier of the empire as a figure of power, authority, and anxiety. Even if a literal imperial column is not intended, Simeon nonetheless evokes in some form the monumental shadow of imperial authority in the hinterland. (We recall that Theodoret compared God's creation of a new form of piety in Simeon's stylitism to an emperor's minting of a new style of coin for circulation.)⁶⁴

When a "Saracen" begs Simeon to cure a "man on the road" who was paralyzed, Theodoret notes specifically that the man had fallen ill "at Callinicum, an important citadel [*phrourion . . . megiston*]."⁶⁵ Callinicum, a garrison town on the Euphrates, was from the fourth through sixth centuries a key site in military conflicts between the Roman and Sassanid Persian Empires. Its name, even in Theodoret's time, must have invoked both the long reach of Roman imperial power and the extreme dangers of life on the frontier. The parade of Saracens, Ishmaelites, and other "barbarian" tribes—some from outside the Roman *limes*, others possibly *foederati* stationed perilously inside those borders—would similarly signal the power and danger of Roman life in the borderlands.⁶⁶ Simeon's pillar was stationed further inland from the Persian border⁶⁷ but nonetheless becomes a site for the display of—or threat to?—the long reach of the Christian Roman Empire.⁶⁸

It may be, of course, that Theodoret the author intended to harness the "fame" of Simeon in order to shore up his own ecclesiastical authority and solidify the boundaries of a Christian Roman Empire. But the signifying calculus of celebrity does not resolve so simply: saints, like stars, "embody cultural contradictions in the realm of identity." Theodoret (nearing the

end of his account of Simeon's life) contrasts Simeon's local authority—judging among and preaching to his followers—with his wider influence:

Although involved in these activities and doing all these things, he does not overlook the care of the holy churches, now combatting pagan impiety, now putting down the audacity of the Jews, at other times scattering the factions of heretics. Sometimes he writes to the Emperor about these things, sometimes he rouses the governors to zeal for God, at other times he encourages the very pastors of the churches to take greater care of their flocks.⁶⁹

On view here are communities in turmoil yet soothed by the saint's power. "Holy churches," presumably far and wide racked by dissension and disorder, seem unable to rely on either emperors or bishops without the intervention of the saint. Yet it is in precisely these institutions that Simeon vests the hope for "care." How do the saint, the church, and the empire fit together? Or do they? Simeon's saintliness neither simply upholds nor critiques the social structures of his day (church and empire): rather, his fuzzy relations to both allow audiences to see multiple possible social meaning in and through him.

Mockers and Skeptics: The Commodified Saint

Finally let me turn to the third component of celebrity discourse I outlined above: the commodification of the saint. Of course, we see this commodification narrated in bluntly literal fashion already in Theodoret's *vita*: tiny statues of Simeon, dotting the commercial landscape of the old imperial capital of Rome. We can view the *vita* itself as a form of commodification, launching Simeon into wider circulation: not only physical pilgrim souvenirs and (after his death) physical remains⁷⁰ but also multiple literary iterations. Within a generation or so two further accounts of Simeon's life had appeared, both (apparently) generated out of the community surrounding the saint: a lengthy, anonymous Syriac *vita* and a much shorter Greek *vita* ascribed to a certain Antonius.⁷¹ Each author presents his audience with a different Simeon, a Simeon whose iconic image is pressed to render meaning in different areas of Christian life. To take one example: The Greek and Syriac lives deal with the saint's family in much more detail than Theodoret's account, opening up yet another cultural discourse to the meaningful intervention of saintly signification.⁷² To be

sure, we can simply acknowledge that different authors might have different ideas and different experiences of the saint, reflected in their texts. But in a broader sense, the *fact* of the saint's commodified persona makes him available for multiple and at times even contradictory considerations of Christian culture.

The three circulating lives of Simeon Stylites also give us a sense of the self-reflexive nature of sainthood in the commodified circulation of the saint's life.⁷³ As I noted above, the abstraction of "celebrity" can create a kind of feedback loop, such that sustained attention to *a* celebrity leads to reflection upon the nature or value of celebrity itself. Transplanted into the realm of hagiography, we can see the circulation of saints' lives opening up a critical space for exploring the nature and value of saintliness. Theodoret begins and ends his *vita* by addressing the unusual nature of Simeon's fame, both its enormity and its strangeness. He acknowledges that normally a reader encountering a narrative "outside the limits of what is natural" would consider it to be a "lie." The devout heart, Theodoret is confident, "will surely believe."⁷⁴ The invocation of doubt at the outset prepares a reader to be amazed at yet trusting in Simeon's ascetic feats, just as faithful witnesses to the feats within the story are "overcome with astonishment [*huperagastheis*]."⁷⁵

That careful balance between belief and amazement teeters, however, when Theodoret arrives at the pillar, the very effect and instrument of Simeon's saintly fame: "I myself cannot accept that his standing occurred without divine dispensation. So I appeal to fault-finders [*mempsimoirous*] to bridle their tongues and not allow them to wag at will, but to consider how frequently the Master has contrived such things for the good of the indifferent."⁷⁶ Similarly, not long after (upon recounting his near trampling at the feet of the eager Ishmaelites) Theodoret notes, rather acidly, "Such benefit has welled up from the column at which mockers love to scoff [*philoskōmmonōn skōptomenos*]."⁷⁷ The invocation of the "fault-finders" and "mockers" calls up once more the note of doubt Theodoret had so casually waved away at the outset. Students of Theodoret will often have recourse to the bishop's studied "Hellenism," the educated affect that leads him to dub even the most outlandish forms of ascetic piety "*philosophia*."⁷⁸ On such a reading, Theodoret's "translation" of outlandish Syrian asceticism into a spectacle legible to the *pepaideumenoi* necessarily generates friction and discomfort.⁷⁹ Yet beyond this author-focused reading, we can imagine a more broadly construed critique of the saintly project circulating in

and through Theodoret's *vita*. Theodoret's ambivalence may represent a kind of Hellenized skepticism, but it also poses broader questions about the nature of ascetic fame. What is the value of Christian *philosophia* when it is broadcast across the known world? The pillar, the abstract icon of the fame of a saint,⁸⁰ condenses this uncertainty.

The later literary iterations of Simeon's life reflect Theodoret's uncertainty about ascetic fame through the icon of the saint's pillar. For Antonius, the otherwise unknown author of the brief Greek *vita*, the relationship between pillar and fame seems much less complicated than in Theodoret's version, in which fame and stylitism were chronologically intertwined. For Antonius, Simeon is not famous prior to his ascent on the pillar. Antonius gives no reason for Simeon to climb up on a pillar⁸¹ but merely reports: "After this he made a pillar four cubits high and stood on it for seven years, and his fame spread everywhere [*hē phēmē autou pantachou diatrechousa*]."⁸² Antonius reiterates the causal relationship between pillar and celebrity later in the *vita*: "They changed his pillar into one forty cubits high, and fame of it spread throughout the whole world [*diephēmisthē eis holēn tēn oikoumenēn*]."⁸³ The higher the pillar, the greater the saint's renown. Climbing up on the pillar, an act of ascetic withdrawal provided without rationale or apologia, leads directly to the saint's fame and worldwide wonderworking.

The only hint that Simeon's fame might be problematic in the Greek *vita* actually comes after the saint's death. The author has discovered the saint dead on a Friday, his rigid and disciplined body now soft and emitting a "sweet smell."⁸⁴ Antonius keeps the saint's death "a secret, lest an uproar occur."⁸⁵ Here is our first sense that the fame of the saint is as much a problem as it is divinely ordained. We might be reminded of the reticence of the clergy of Jerusalem in the *Life of Pelagia* upon the postmortem discovery that their beloved local eunuch-hermit was actually a woman in disguise.⁸⁶ Word inevitably gets out that Simeon is dead, and the crowds gather ominously: "armed" Arabs mass to "seize the body," while "screeching birds" overhead replace the serenity of the saint aloft on his pillar.⁸⁷ The aftermath of the saint's growing fame throughout his life is an unsavory desire for his remains after death: "The bishop of Antioch wished to take a hair from [Simeon's] beard as a relic, but his hand withered [at the attempt]."⁸⁸ Only the combined prayers of the assembled bishops restore the hand of the greedy bishop to health, and the saint's body is eventually interred entire in Antioch.⁸⁹ Theodoret focuses our attention on the

outlandish pillar as the uncomfortable icon of the saint's fame. Antonius locates his uneasiness around the saint's celebrification and commodification at his death: the moment when the holy body was liable to dissolution and dissemination. Both *vitae* disrupt their joyful celebration of the "famous" saint with uneasiness and uncertainty.

The longer Syriac *vita*, like its Greek counterparts, places the saint's fame squarely at the beginning of its story, promised to the young Simeon in his first divine vision: "your name shall be great and magnified among the nations from one end of the earth to the other, and kings and judges with everyone else under their authority will obey your word and your ordinance."⁹⁰ The vision even obliquely ties Simeon's fame to his pillar when it leads him up a mountain, shows him a pile of stones, and tells him: "Take and build."⁹¹ The construction, it turns out, is "the sanctuary of God," that is, the church supported by the saint's piety; as we shall see, a clear account of the pillar will wait until the end of the *vita*. Rather, a litany of visions, miracles, and interventions from the saint build up this promised fame:⁹² Simeon is known far and wide, from Rome to Persia,⁹³ venerated even on the open seas, where he appears to sailors in distress.⁹⁴

Only toward the end of this long catalog of miraculous deeds do we get a sense that the saint's prominence itself might be at issue: implored by a local politician to end a drought, Simeon instructs his disciples to gather "the priests and their flocks from everywhere" on the next Friday. The disciples are leery of the saint's strategy: "Be careful lest someone be scandalized and say, 'Look how he is sending to gather the world to show off.'" Undeterred, Simeon instructs an "innumerable crowd" to assemble, at which point he prays and the drought is ended.⁹⁵ In the aftermath of his miracle, Simeon tells his disciples how he prayed (an ultimatum to God: end the crowd's suffering or Simeon's life) but "demanded of them that they tell no one during his life-time."⁹⁶ Placed directly in the saint's most intimate quarters we find uneasiness over his celebrity, the possibility that he might be "showing off" to the crowds rather than remaining a humble servant of God. Even Simeon self-consciously requires discretion from his disciples to restrain his fame during his lifetime.

Only at the end of the account does the narrator explain what has been hinted at throughout: the origins of Simeon's pillar. As Robert Doran explains in his translation of Simeon's *vitae*, the particular choice of this fifth-century hagiographer to defer the account of the pillar is made clear by

alternative surviving versions of the Syriac *vita*.⁹⁷ This deferral of the most iconic fact of Simeon's saintly life is already notable: is the narrator also leery of "showing off" the saint's most famous trait? After recounting an eighteen-month period of isolation and temptation,⁹⁸ the *vita* simply states: "After this he set up a stone and stood on it. It was two cubits high."⁹⁹ As in the previous iterations, fame follows: "After this, news about Mar Simeon began to be reported in the world and people began to visit him from every region."¹⁰⁰ The narrator pauses to explain Simeon's ascetic practices and then reiterates the stages of his monastic career, concluding with a list of his pillars: eleven, seventeen, twenty-two, and forty cubits high.¹⁰¹ Finally, the narrator, like Theodore before him, mounts a defense of Simeon's extraordinary act: "Perhaps someone will say, 'What made it necessary or required that he mount on a pillar? Could he not please our Lord on the ground or at most in that corner?'"¹⁰² The Syriac narrator takes up and expands one of Theodore's arguments: Simeon acted like the biblical prophets, doing extraordinary deeds to "awaken the world" to proper piety.¹⁰³ The narrator also makes it clear that this was God's will, from God's direct instruction to Simeon to his divine intervention enabling the construction of the final, tallest pillar.¹⁰⁴ After reiterating once more Simeon's "high repute" and fame, the author proceeds directly to narrate his miraculous death.¹⁰⁵

The narrator does not go so far as to invoke the "mockers" or "fault-finders" of Theodore's account; nonetheless, I think we can safely read this deferral of the pillar and the author's apologetic stance as a self-reflexive comment on the problem of saintly celebrity. Until these final chapters, we attribute most of Simeon's "fame" to his miraculous deeds—visions, healings, apparitions—all of which demonstrate his power through God. His intervention in a drought raises the first concerns about the relationship between his divine powers and his fame (the fear of "showing off," reminiscent also of Antony's fear in Athanasius's *vita*), and only then do we confront the most iconic, yet strangely muted, symbol of Simeon's saintliness: his pillar.¹⁰⁶ That we should wait so long to confront this symbol of Simeon's life is telling; the introduction of the hypothetical "someone" objecting to the saint on a pillar is even more so. The author valiantly explains the pillar's significance as a permutation of prophetic performance, but the unease has set in. Deferring discussion of the pillar until near the end of the life, and defending it so vociferously, only amplify that unease.

Conclusions

The pillar was the sign of Simeon's commodified sainthood, the symbol by which he circulated through the burgeoning economy of saints in late antiquity. It also represented the abstract quality of his saintly celebration, his fame qua fame: as such, it condensed in these texts the anxiety over ascetic celebrity. Fame tightly linked to ascetic prowess could be tolerated: witness the Syriac *vita*'s numerous examples of miracles, one following on the other almost without benefit of chronological ordering. The pillar, however, represented the abstract quality of fame, saintliness detached from the saint, the abstracted product of the commodification and circulation of saints over and beyond their specific, materially lived lives. None of these *vitae* resolve the problem of Simeon's ascetic celebrity, but as the modern study of celebrity culture suggests, cultural meaning is rarely resolved in the multifarious ways in which the celebrity icon circulated. The saint, like his modern counterpart, is instead an opportunity for contemplation of the paradoxes of culture—even the paradox of the saint's own ascetic fame.

In a brief overview of the long chapter on Simeon in Theodoret's *Religious History* we saw the ways the saint could emerge as a matrix for the interrogation of cultural meaning: the power of empire in the borderlands and the religious authority of the institutional church are both embedded in but not resolved in the life of the saint. Even ascetic fame itself could become an object of cultural scrutiny in the more self-reflexive examples of hagiography, such as the three late ancient *vitae* of Simeon. While never detracting from the veneration of the saint, these *vitae* of Simeon nonetheless open up his life imaginatively to (unresolved) critiques of ascetic celebrity, the uneasy paradox of social withdrawal as a means to social renown.

I'd like to pause here, in my conclusion, to press a bit on the value of reading late ancient hagiography through the lens of modern celebrity culture studies. My goal here is not simply to "theorify" late ancient studies for theory's sake. Rather, I want to think critically about the ways that hagiography has been embedded in particular forms of social history since the 1970s.¹⁰⁷ To be sure, these literary texts can and will continue to be mined for speculative details about late ancient material life: not only the motives and desires of monks but those of their followers and admirers, as well as details of social life from the economic to the alimentary.¹⁰⁸ But the trend in producing social history out of hagiography reproduces cer-

tain assumptions about the relation between author, text, and historian and potentially forecloses other modes of analysis.

When we read for social history, we reify saints' lives as authorial products with more or less identifiable aims and contexts: they "define" the saint for certain theological or political ends; they compete with other cults; they promote one set of ideas or ideologies over others; and so forth. But hagiography, perhaps even more than other surviving late ancient genres, resists such historiographic fixation.¹⁰⁹ Much of our hagiographic corpus is anonymous, or functionally so—beyond the name Antonius we can say almost nothing certain about the author of the Greek *vita* of Simeon, for instance. Yet a particular style of social historical reading requires that texts be imagined primarily as the products of authors, and once we imagine a series of authors-producing-texts (vaguely similar to our own knowledge-making practices) it is remarkably easy to fix an image of late ancient Christianity in place that is beyond substantive critique or revision. Ellen Muehlberger has written eloquently about the problem of authors, which has a particular resonance in the study of early Christianity since "[t]he author in our field is almost always also two other things: a father and a holy man."¹¹⁰ We are a discipline devoted to the *fathers*, if not confessionally then often historiographically.

Some avenues of cultural studies can allow us to open up our ancient texts to new kinds of analysis, detached from the recapitulatory meaning-making processes of the discipline of late antiquity. I have proposed revisiting hagiography as a site for cultural production rather than (primarily) as a repository of social "facts" to be ascertained. Let's imagine Simeon not as a textual object under the control of multiple authors but rather as an effect of the circulation of the iconic image of a saint in a "celebrity economy" of radically open signification. The meaning in a saint's life, once made "famous," will always already exceed the bounds of a text delimited by an "author." The late ancient holy man, or woman, can never again rest in splendid isolation, as he, or she, will always be haunted by the multiple meanings endlessly generated by their audiences.

Notes

1. Throughout this essay I refer to the three surviving *vitae* of Simeon Stylites (the Elder), cited from the following editions: (1) Theodoret of Cyrrhus, *Historia religiosa* (hereafter *h. rel.*) 26, written ca. 444; Greek text in Pierre Canivet and Alice Leroy-Molinghen, eds., *Théodoret de Cyr: Histoire des moines de Syrie*, vol. 2,

SC 257 (Paris: Cerf, 1979), 2158–214. (2) The short Greek *Vita Symeonis* (hereafter Greek *VS*) of Antonius, of unknown date; Greek text in Hans Lietzmann, ed., *Das Leben des heiligen Symeon Stylites*, Texte und Untersuchungen 32.4 (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1908), 20–78. (3) The very fulsome Syriac *Vita Symeonis* (hereafter Syriac *VS*), anonymously authored around 473; Syriac text with facing Latin paraphrase in Stephano Evodio Assemani, *Acta Sanctorum Martyrum Orientalium et Occidentalium in Duas Partes Distributae*, vol. 2 (Rome: Collini, 1748), 268–398. All three texts have been translated by Robert Doran, *The Lives of Simeon Stylites*, Cistercian Studies 112 (Kalamazoo, Mich.: Cistercian Publications, 1992), whose chapter numbers I use and from which I cite throughout this essay.

2. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.11.

3. *Ibid.*, 26.12.

4. *Ibid.* Theresa Urbainczyk, *Theodoret of Cyrrhus: The Bishop and the Holy Man* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 98: “it may seem improbable to us that instead of retreating further into the countryside or desert Simeon had a pillar built for himself, which gradually became taller and taller.”

5. Anthony Eastmond, “Body vs. Column: The Cults of St. Symeon Stylites,” in *Desire and Denial in Byzantium*, ed. Liz James (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 1999), 87–100, at 87: “Symeon’s life was one of paradoxes: he sought to escape the world, but the further he removed himself from it, the more the world sought him out.”

6. For a very different comparison of “reclusive” figures throughout history, see Barry Stone, *I Want to Be Alone: Solitary Lives; Salvation Seekers, Celebrity Recluses, Hermit Poets and Survivalists from the Buddha to Greta Garbo* (Millers Point: Allen and Unwin, 2010).

7. John Bainbridge, “The Great Garbo,” *Life* 38, no. 2 (January 10, 1955): 84–88, 90, 92, 95–96; 38, no. 3 (January 17, 1955): 76–80, 83–84, 86, 88, 90; 38, no. 4 (January 24, 1955): 112–14, 116, 118, 121–22, 124, 129–30. These essays are parts of a biography published by Bainbridge in the same year: *Garbo* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1955), revised and updated in 1971.

8. Bainbridge, “Great Garbo,” *Life* 38, no. 4: 113.

9. See also the relatively unsuccessful 1984 film *Garbo Talks*, which hinges on the coupled desire for and inability to access the celebrity (<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0087313/>; accessed December 30, 2015).

10. Graeme Turner, *Understanding Celebrity* (London: Sage, 2004), 23. On celebrity and episcopal authority, see Andrew S. Jacobs, *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016), 31–64.

11. Celebrity and fame have been useful categories of analysis in premodern studies: see Leo Braudy, *The Frenzy of Renown: Fame and Its History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); and, more recently, Thomas Habinek, “Seneca’s

Renown: *Gloria, Claritudo*, and the Replication of the Roman Elite," *Classical Antiquity* 19 (2000): 264–303.

12. Murray Milner Jr., "Is Celebrity a New Kind of Status System?," *Society* 57 (2010): 379–87.

13. The classic essay is Daniel Boorstin, "From Hero to Celebrity: The Human Pseudo-event," in *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-events in America* (1961; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 2012), 45–76, which emerges from a critique of consumerist culture. See the summary of previous understandings of celebrity in P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 10–25.

14. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, xi.

15. *Ibid.*, 57.

16. *Ibid.*, 65.

17. Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (London: Routledge, 2004), 15–16, cited (in an earlier edition) by Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 17.

18. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 18.

19. *Ibid.*, 48.

20. *Ibid.*, 244.

21. See Kathryn Lofton, "Religion and the American Celebrity," *Social Compass* 58 (2011): 346–52, at 347–49.

22. Ellis Cashmore, "Celebrity in the Twenty-First Century Imagination," *Cultural and Social History* 8 (2011): 405–13, at 406. See also Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, xi: "To use a Marxian metaphor . . . the celebrity sign is pure exchange value cleaved from use value."

23. Marshall, *Celebrity and Power*, 4; Cashmore, "Celebrity," 411–12; Fred Inglis, *A Short History of Celebrity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2010), 8 and *passim*.

24. We can see multiple examples of hagiographic multiplication and fragmentation in late antiquity: see Samuel Rubenson, *The Letters of Saint Antony: Monasticism and the Making of a Saint*, Studies in Antiquity and Christianity (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress Press, 1995), 126–84; Stephen J. Davis, *The Cult of Saint Thecla: A Tradition of Women's Piety in Late Antiquity*, Oxford Early Christian Studies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

25. Françoise Meltzer and Jas Elsner, introduction to *Saints: Faith without Borders*, ed. Françoise Meltzer and Jas Elsner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), ix.

26. For recent important work on the literary history of hagiography, see Derek Krueger, *Writing and Holiness: The Practice of Authorship in the Early Christian East*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); Virginia Burrus, *The Sex Lives of Saints: An Erotics of Ancient Hagiography*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

2004); Martin Hinterberger, "The Byzantine Hagiographer and His Text," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 2, *Genres and Contexts*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2014), 211–46.

27. Andrew S. Jacobs, "Relics," in *Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger Bagnall et al. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 5766–67; Andrew S. Jacobs, *Remains of the Jews: The Holy Land and Christian Empire in Late Antiquity*, Divinations (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2003), 174–91; Gary Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Publications, 1982); Patricia Cox Miller, *The Corporeal Imagination: Signifying the Holy in Late Ancient Christianity*, Divinations (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 62–81.

28. On the critique of relic veneration in the larger context of late ancient material Christianity, see David Hunter, "Vigilantius of Calagurris and Vincentius of Rouen: Ascetics, Relics, and Clerics in Late Roman Gaul," *J ECS* 7 (1999): 401–30.

29. On the *vita*'s use of "landscape" in its literary context, see Dag Øistein Endsjø, *Primordial Landscapes, Incorruptible Bodies: Desert Asceticism and the Christian Appropriation of Greek Ideas on Geography, Bodies, and Immortality* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2007), following James E. Goehring, "The Dark Side of the Landscape: Ideology and Power in the Christian Myth of the Desert," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003): 437–51.

30. Athanasius, *Vita Antonii* 12–14.

31. *Ibid.*, 49.

32. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 96: "Theodoret begins by stressing Symeon's fame."

33. Stephanos Efthymiadis, with Vincent Déroche, "Greek Hagiography in Late Antiquity (Fourth–Seventh Centuries)," in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Byzantine Hagiography*, vol. 1, *Periods and Places*, ed. Stephanos Efthymiadis (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2011), 51, suggests that the chapter on Simeon was "first published as a separate work." See Alice Leroy-Molinghen, "Les manuscrits de l'*Histoire Philothée*," *Byzantion* 34 (1964): 27–47, on the separate circulation of Theodoret's *vita* of Simeon. But see also Rebecca Krawiec's "A Question of Character: The 'Labor of Composition' as 'Preventative Medicine' in Theodoret of Cyrrhus's *Religious History*" in the present volume for an insightful discussion of the literary coherence of the work as a whole.

34. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.2.

35. *Ibid.*, 26.4.

36. *Ibid.*, 26.6; here Theodoret likely invokes the example of Antony, who withdrew to the "inner" mountain (see above).

37. *Ibid.*, 26.7.

38. *Ibid.*, 26.8.

39. *Ibid.*, 26.10.

40. Ibid., 26.11.

41. Ibid.

42. Ibid., 26.12.

43. Ibid., 26.14.

44. Ibid., 26.22.

45. Ibid., 26.25.

46. The works of Susan Ashbrook Harvey especially have expertly limned the contours of embodied piety in the various lives of Simeon: in addition to Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Stylite's Liturgy: Ritual and Religious Identity in Late Antiquity," *J ECS* 6 (1998): 523–39, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, "The Sense of a Stylite: Perspectives on Simeon the Elder," *VC* 42 (1988): 376–94; Susan Ashbrook Harvey, *Scenting Salvation: Ancient Christianity and the Olfactory Imagination*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 42 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 186–97. See also Charles Stang, "Digging Holes and Building Pillars: Simeon Stylites and the 'Geography' of Ascetic Practice," *HTR* 103 (2010): 447–70.

47. Ellen Muehlberger, "Simeon and Other Women in Theodoret's *Religious History*: Gender in the Representation of Late Ancient Christian Asceticism," *J ECS* 23 (2015): 583–606.

48. Patricia Cox Miller, "Is There a Harlot in This Text? Hagiography and the Grotesque," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33 (2003): 419–36; Burrus, *Sex Lives of Saints*, 53–90; Elizabeth A. Clark, "Holy Women, Holy Words: Early Christian Women, Social History, and the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *J ECS* 6 (1998): 431–30.

49. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.1. Theodoret reiterates this question at the end of the *vita*, putting it in the mouth of a "virtuous deacon": "Are you human?" (26.23).

50. Turner, *Understanding Celebrity*, 23: "the celebrity generates para-social interactions that operate as a means of compensating for changes in the social construction of the communities within which many of us live."

51. Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 100.

52. Ibid., 101.

53. Harvey, "Stylite's Liturgy," 538.

54. Ibid., 532. Harvey contrasts this "triumphant" church with the more symbiotic relationship between saint and church portrayed in the Syriac *vita*.

55. As child and young man, see Theodoret, *h. rel.* 4.9–12, 8.15, 9.4, 9.15, 12.4, 13.16–18. On Theodoret's self-presentation in the *Religious History*, see Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 130–42. On his "networks" with ascetics, see Adam Schor, *Theodoret's People: Social Networks and Religious Conflict in Late Roman Syria*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 48 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 118–20.

56. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.14; see also 26.15, 16.

57. Ibid., 26.19.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid., 26.15, 16, 21.
60. Ibid., 26.15.
61. Ibid., 26.20, 11.
62. On language in the *Historia religiosa*, see Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 15–21, 72–79.
63. Eastmond, “Body vs. Column,” 97.
64. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.12.
65. Ibid., 26.16. The strange detail that the man was “on the road” may invoke the parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:29–37); it is unclear, though, if the “outsider”/Samaritan is the Saracen or Simeon (or both?). On “Saracens” in the material and imaginative landscape of the period, see William Ward, *The Mirage of the Saracen: Christians and Nomads in the Sinai Peninsula in Late Antiquity*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 54 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015).
66. Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks, 1989), 149–53, assesses the possible origins of the various Arab tribal figures in Theodoret’s *vita* of Simeon (and, on 153–59, in the rest of Theodoret’s corpus; and, on 159–64, on Arabs in the Greek and Syriac *vitae*).
67. Notably, Theodoret’s own See of Cyrrhus was closer to the Persian frontier than Simeon’s pillar.
68. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.1: “Not only all the subjects of the Roman government [*tēs Rhōmaiōn hēgemoniās*] know the famous Simeon, the great marvel of the world [*to mega thauma oikoumenēs*], but even the Persians, the Medes, and the Ethiopians.”
69. Ibid., 26.27.
70. Vikan, *Early Byzantine Pilgrimage Art*, 4, 6, 8, and, for stylite pilgrim tokens, *passim*. Many of these pilgrim tokens are of Simeon Stylites the Younger but some (as on 35–36) may be of Simeon Stylites the Elder. On Simeon’s relics (bodily and columnar), see Eastmond, “Body vs. Column.”
71. Doran, *Lives*, 36–66. Urbainczyk (*Theodoret*, 101) dates the Greek *vita* of Antonius to “between 459 and 594.”
72. Antonius (Greek *VS*, 5, 14) introduces Simeon’s parents; Syriac *VS* (1, 9, 14–15, 105) introduces Simeon’s brother Shemshi. On family in ascetic discourse, see Andrew S. Jacobs and Rebecca Krawiec, “Fathers Know Best? Christian Families in the Age of Asceticism,” *J ECS* 11 (2003): 257–63. On family in Syriac hagiography in particular, see Susan Ashbrook Harvey, “Sacred Bonding: Mothers and Daughters in Early Syriac Hagiography,” *J ECS* 4 (1996): 27–56; Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, “Christian Legend in Medieval Iraq: Siblings, Sacrifice, and Sanctity in *Behnam and Sarah*,” in the present volume.

73. Since we are dealing with representations *of* the saint, it's difficult to posit how Simeon himself reacted to or managed the fact of his own celebrity, but certainly some “famous” monks—like Garbo herself—could leverage the paradox of renown and withdrawal during their monastic careers, such as the middle Byzantine Cypriot abbot “Neophytos the Recluse”: see Marie-Hélène Congordeau, “L'*Enkleistra* dans les écrits de Néophytos le Reclus,” in *Les saints et leur sanctuaire à Byzance*, ed. Cathérine Jolivet-Lévy, Michel Kaplan, and Jean-Pierre Sodini, *Byzantina Sorbonensia* 11 (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1993), 137–49. (Many thanks to Georgia Frank for drawing my attention to this article and this saint.)

74. Theodoret, *b. rel.* 26.1.

75. *Ibid.*, 26.8.

76. *Ibid.*, 26.12.

77. *Ibid.*, 26.14.

78. *Ibid.*, 26.1; Harvey, “Sense of a Stylite,” 378–79; Urbainczyk, *Theodoret*, 101–2.

79. On the anxieties generated by popular “thaumastic” viewing, see Christopher Frilingos, *Spectacles of Empire: Monsters, Martyrs, and the Book of Revelation*, *Divinations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), 39–63.

80. David Frankfurter, “Stylites and *Phallobates*: Pillar Religions in Late Antique Syria,” *VC* 44 (1990): 169–98, at 186: “Most pilgrim tokens (or *eulogiae*) of Syrian stylites emphasized the pillar so much that only the head of the saint was visible on top—as if the pillar itself constituted his entire torso.”

81. We might hear a hint of a justification—*imitatio Christi*—in Antonius, Greek *VS* 13 (immediately following Simeon's ascent): “Holy Simeon imitated his teacher, Christ.” The line may be, however, referring solely to the miracles which follow. On the vexed question of *imitatio Christi* in all three *vitae*, see Stang, “Digging Holes,” 459–60, 469–70.

82. Antonius, Greek *VS* 12.

83. *Ibid.*, 17.

84. *Ibid.*, 28; Harvey, *Scenting Salvation*, 190–92.

85. Antonius, Greek *VS* 29.

86. See the discussion in Miller, “Is There a Harlot?”

87. Antonius, Greek *VS* 29.

88. *Ibid.*

89. *Ibid.*, 31–32.

90. Syriac *VS* 3.

91. *Ibid.*, 4.

92. *Ibid.*, 34, at the beginning of the account of Simeon's miraculous healings, notes, “For up till then he had not become famous,” although this line is missing from other manuscripts.

93. Ibid., 68–69: “Simeon the Christian who stands on a pillar among the Romans” appears in visions to persecuted Persian Christians and the magus persecuting them.

94. Ibid., 70–73.

95. Ibid., 75.

96. Ibid., 76.

97. Doran, *Lives*, 45–50.

98. Syriac VS 93–101.

99. Ibid., 102.

100. Ibid., 104.

101. Ibid., 110.

102. Ibid., 111.

103. Ibid.; cf. Theodoret, *h. rel.* 26.12.

104. Syriac VS 112–13.

105. Ibid., 114.

106. That we are expected to imagine Simeon throughout most of the Syriac *vita* on his iconic pillar is clear from passing references: *ibid.*, 7, 41–42 (visions of “ascent”), 46, 68–69 (the apparitions in Persia).

107. Much of the social historical focus on Simeon can be traced to Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 61 (1971): 80–101; on which see Peter Brown, “The Rise and Function of the Holy Man in Late Antiquity, 1971–1997,” *J ECS* 6 (1998): 353–76; Harvey, “Stylite’s Liturgy” (in the same journal issue). In a new introduction written on the twentieth anniversary of his 1988 masterpiece *The Body and Society*, Brown laments that “I had shot the red light” in reconstructing the world of Egyptian monasticism on the basis of hagiography. Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women, and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity*, Columbia Classics in Religion (1988; repr., New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), li: “These texts were not meant to catch reality.”

108. On the historiography of hagiography, and an elegant blend of literary and social history, see Jeanne-Nicole Mellon Saint-Laurent, *Missionary Stories and the Formation of the Syriac Churches*, Transformation of the Classical Heritage 55 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2015); Mellon Saint-Laurent, “Christian Legend in Medieval Iraq.”

109. Elizabeth A. Clark, *History, Theory, Text: Historians and the Linguistic Turn* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).

110. Ellen Muehlberger, “On Authors, Fathers, and Holy Men,” *Marginalia Review of Books*, September 20, 2015, accessed January 4, 2015, <http://marginalia.lareviewofbooks.org/on-authors-fathers-and-holy-men-by-ellen-muehlberger/>.